



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **North Dakota Department of Health Reports Recent Hantavirus-Related Death**

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health announced today that a resident of central North Dakota has died recently from complications of Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS), a rare disease spread by infected rodent droppings, urine and saliva. The individual, an adult with no underlying medical conditions, died while hospitalized.

While officials could not determine the exact activity that led to this individual's infection, the individual did have potential exposure to rodents before becoming ill. People can be exposed to Hantavirus by breathing in air contaminated with the virus when fresh rodent droppings, urine or nesting materials are stirred up. Hantavirus is not transmitted from person to person. The greatest risk is associated with exposure to rodent droppings in closed, dry areas.

"This unfortunate death is a reminder for people to be mindful of the presence or evidence of wild rodents when conducting clean-up or other activities in a house, barn or other buildings, especially in rural areas," said Michelle Feist, Epidemiology and Surveillance Program Manager. "It is important to avoid actions that raise dust, such sweeping or vacuuming, if signs of rodents are present."

Hantavirus is a rare disease. The general public is not at a higher risk of contracting Hantavirus infection unless they are doing activities that put them in contact with rodent droppings, urine, saliva or nesting materials. The Department of Health recommends the following steps to safely work in areas with possible rodent infestation.

- Ventilate the space by opening the doors and windows for 30 minutes. You should leave the area during this period.
- Do not stir up dust by sweeping or vacuuming up droppings, urine or nesting materials.
- Use a commercial disinfectant following the instructions on the label or a solution of one part bleach to nine parts water.

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- Wear gloves and spray disinfectant on dead rodents, droppings or nesting materials. Use a paper towel to pick up the urine and droppings and dispose of the waste in the garbage.
- Mop floors and clean countertops, cabinets and drawers with disinfectant.
- Wash your hands with soap and water immediately after the cleanup.

Symptoms of HPS usually begin two to three weeks after infection. Early symptoms commonly include fever, muscle and body aches, fatigue, headache, dizziness, chills, nausea and vomiting. The illness worsens within a short period of time to include coughing and severe shortness of breath as lungs fill with fluid. Anyone who has had exposure to wild rodents and experiences these symptoms should contact their physician immediately.

The last reported case of Hantavirus in North Dakota occurred in 2009. Including this recent case, only twelve cases of HPS have been reported to the department of health since 1993, when the virus was first recognized in the United States. Seven of the twelve North Dakota cases were fatal. Nationally, through April 21, 2014, 639 cases of Hantavirus have been reported in 34 states, in mainly rural areas. The virus has been fatal in 36 percent of the cases.

For more information, contact Michelle Feist, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

*Please note:*

*A fact sheet containing important precautions to minimize the risk of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome infection is available at [www.ndhealth.gov/Disease/Documents/faqs/Hantavirus.pdf](http://www.ndhealth.gov/Disease/Documents/faqs/Hantavirus.pdf).*

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